



Connecting Older Adults with Community-based Resources and Options

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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*Grandparents Day is September 11*

## **Grandparents and Older Adults Raising Children Find Support Through Local Agencies**

Pat Hoover and her husband, like other couples at the end of summer, are settling their family into the back-to-school routine. But, unlike most other families, the children the Hoovers are sending back to school are their grandchildren.

Six years ago, the Hoovers' lives took an unexpected turn when they moved from Arkansas to La Grange to raise their son's children, a boy and girl who are now 9 and 10. They left a successful real estate business and incurred more than \$100,000 in legal fees in a process that left them with joint custody four years ago. The couple had to take early, reduced Social Security and have already spent half of their retirement savings to care for the children.

The Hoovers are among 100,000 grandparents in Illinois who are raising their grandchildren, according to the Illinois Department on Aging. Nationally, 2.7 million grandparents were responsible for most of the basic needs of grandchildren who lived with them in 2009, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Half a million of those grandparents had incomes below the poverty level.

Grandparents and other older relatives raising children face challenges that a mother or father would not. **See list of challenges below.**

Regardless, Pat insists, "No matter how tough, never give up. Never walk away from the children."

She found out about support services from her grandson's preschool teacher about a year after moving here. The teacher had heard about the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group sponsored by Aging Care Connections from someone at her gym. Aging Care Connections, a nonprofit agency providing services for older adults in the southwest suburbs, is a community partner of AgeOptions, the Area Agency on Aging of suburban Cook County.

"The most important thing I've gotten is the support group," Pat said. But she is also quick to add that "On at least three occasions, maybe four, I've been so distraught I just needed to talk to someone and I've walked in and talked to Sue (Murphy, the support group leader)." She believes

the counseling provided by Aging Care Connections has been more beneficial than any paid counseling she has received.

In addition to the care and counseling, Pat said the gift card she received from Aging Care Connections helped a lot with purchasing food, clothing and gas – all of which are expensive and go fast with children in the house. Some of the support group members are living off only Social Security and scrimping on things for themselves in order to provide for the children, she said.

She also enjoyed the luxury of a pedicure at a recent spa day and resource fair Aging Care Connections held for grandparents and caregivers.

“We don’t have the energy we used to have,” Pat said. “By the time we do everything a 30-year-old mom does, we can’t always drag ourselves to a support group. Or maybe we (miss a support group meeting because) we need to take a child to the doctor or go their school... But counseling and support groups are key factors (to successfully raising grandchildren). That’s where you’re going to find out about all the services available.”

“Relatives raising children are often thrust into their roles unprepared, so they are unaware of services available and how to navigate systems,” said Sarah Stein, caregiver coordinator at AgeOptions, the Area Agency on Aging of suburban Cook County.

AgeOptions and its network of community agencies offer a variety of services to support older adults raising children, including individual counseling, support groups, connection to resources, limited financial assistance and assistance with legal matters such as guardianship and adoption issues. They can also help with access to services and programs such as prescription drug and energy assistance, child-only Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance, Toys for Tots and SNAP (formerly known as food stamps).

For information about services for grandparents and other older adults raising children, call AgeOptions at (708)383-0258 or (708)524-1653 for TTY users.

### **Challenges Facing Grandparents Raising Grandchildren**

- **Finances:** Many grandparents are on fixed incomes and even if they are still working, they had planned to save for retirement; with children to raise they may not be able to afford retirement.
- **Emotional:** Grandparents may be coming to terms with the switch in lifestyle, with grief over the loss of a child or anger at a child who may be in jail or addicted to drugs, and with losing friends because the grandparent has less time and less in common with friends not raising children.
- **Housing:** Many grandparents are in small senior apartments that do not have room for children, nor do they allow children; those who do have room still may need beds and other furnishings.
- **Child care:** If they are working, grandparents need help arranging and paying for child care.

- Health insurance: Medicare does not cover children, so grandparents have to get children signed up for coverage and make sure they continue to have coverage as they reach 18 and beyond.
- Legal: Getting birth certificates and other documents and going to court to get guardianship/adoption can be long, expensive and frustrating processes.
- Education: Grandparents may have to figure out how to help children enroll in school, get tutoring and help with homework (when they have not been in school for a long time themselves), go to conferences, figure out special education and individualized education plans, etc.
- Keeping up with modern times: Social media, Internet dangers, cell phones and other things were not around when they raised their children.
- Children's mental/emotional health: Children are grieving the loss of their parents (even if the parents are still alive, they are less present now) and also the loss of their grandparents (who now have to become parents); children may also have other behavioral issues related to experiencing trauma, unstable living situation, mental illness, drug exposure in utero, etc.
- Grandparents' health: Grandparents are often older, may have chronic conditions and need help with chores, and may find it difficult to keep up with young children.

AgeOptions and its network of community agencies are the principal source of information regarding senior services in suburban Cook County, Ill. A nonprofit organization located in Oak Park, AgeOptions has served the older adults of suburban Cook County and their caregivers as an Area Agency on Aging since 1974. For more information, please visit the Agency website at [www.ageoptions.org](http://www.ageoptions.org).

AgeOptions connects adults age 60 and over with resources and service options so they can live their lives to the fullest and remain in their homes as long as possible. In 2010 we met the needs of more than 198,500 individuals in 130 communities within 30 townships that have a diverse population of 460,000 older adults. AgeOptions advocates, plans, develops and funds programs and coordinates a network of community-based senior service agencies to ensure an effective and efficient system of service delivery. Support is provided through the Older Americans Act, Illinois General Revenue Funds, local funds and individual contributions.