

"The health, productivity, and creativity of any society are the direct result of how the children of that society were treated."

-Dr. Bruce Perry, M.D., Ph. D



STRENGTHENING FAMILIES, SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES

STRONG FAMILIES BUILD STRONG COMMUNITIES

## Grandparents: Then and Now

*By Susan Christofferson*

The Nurturing Center's goal is to ensure that each child has the right to be treated with respect and live in safety with secure, healthy, nurturing relationships.

Thirty years ago when my mother held her newborn granddaughter for the first time I watched as her eyes filled with tears of joy. From that moment on, she immersed herself in her first time role as a grandparent and devoted herself to Megan. Shortly before her death six years later she authored three booklets entitled "Creative Grand parenting" in which she shared ideas and activities to engage in with your special grandchild. I long for my daughter to announce to me that she and her husband are pregnant. Until then I'll continue to live vicariously through my grandparents friends and the lovely children I see at the Nurturing Center each day.

Grandparents today look very different from grandparents a generation ago. We are often still in the workforce - far from retirement - and may be geographically distanced from children. Then there is the phenomenal number of grandparents raising grandchildren due to the absence of the child's parent. More than 2.4 million grandparents are raising their grandchildren nationwide. In Montana, nearly 10,000 children are living in grandparent-headed households, a 30% increase in the past decade. They stepped in at a moments notice when their families needed help and put their own lives on hold. The American Association of Retired Persons Grandparent Information Center has researched some of the reasons for this intergenerational issue. "We hear the most that drug and alcohol problems are causing parents to be unable to raise their children. mental illness is also a strong contributor as well as incarceration, death of a parent, poverty, divorce, child abuse and neglect, teen pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, or domestic violence. Military deployment is also a reason that grandparents are called to step in and raise their grandchildren while one or both parents are deployed."

AARP conducted research in 2003 to examine the unique needs of diverse grandparents raising grandchildren. The study resulted in a report *Lean on Me: Support and Minority Outreach for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren*. The report details the myriad of challenges grandparents face including:

- Finances
- Legal concerns
- Health
- Housing
- Education
- Respite care
- Childrearing
- Family communication and relationships
- Special needs of grandchildren
- Social isolation

The research also zeroed in on a solution to these problems faced by grandparents raising grandchildren. Support groups for grandparents (and often other relatives) raising children are a key outreach mechanism and link to these grandparents. The Nurturing Center recognizes the importance of providing resources and support to all families regardless of who is involved in child rearing. Grandparent caregivers are deserving of accurate, accessible, timely information and assistance about the issues they may face. The Nurturing Center is committed to that as well.

### National resources

AARP Grandparent Information Center 888-687-2277 [www.aarp.org/grandparents](http://www.aarp.org/grandparents)

GrandsPlace 860-763-5789 [www.grandsplace.org](http://www.grandsplace.org)

KINship Information Network 772-501-0502 [www.kinsupport.org](http://www.kinsupport.org)