

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

2019 ANNUAL REPORT



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Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Annual Report

Introduction

This is the eleventh annual report of the Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren for the calendar year 2019 submitted in compliance with M.G.L. Chapter 3, section 69(a).

The Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren was established in 2008 to be a resource to the Commonwealth on issues affecting grandparents (and other kin) raising grandchildren. The Commission operated without funding until fiscal year 2016 when we received our first appropriation, which allowed us to retain our Director, Colleen Pritoni. The support of a full time Director allows us to reach hundreds of grandparents raising grandchildren and also connects us with agencies that can provide assistance to grandparents raising grandchildren. This report does not describe every activity but summarizes the significant programs and achievements of the Commission in 2019.

With sustained financial support, we will continue our work advocating for and providing resources to these caretakers, whose love and support and provide a stable and safe home for thousands of children in Massachusetts.

We thank the Governor and the Legislature for your continued support of the important work being done by the Commission on behalf of grandparents and other caregivers who take on the emotional and financial responsibility of raising their grandchildren and other kin. We are also thankful for the assistance of the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Elder Affairs, the Department of Transitional Assistance, the Office of the Attorney General, and many other state agencies, and the many volunteers who assist in the Commission's work.

Sincerely,

Ilene Mitchell

Chair, Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Programs and Education

“Hey, Kiddo”-a presentation for grandparents and grandchildren by author Jarrett J. Krosoczka

On Saturday April 20, 2019 the Grandparents Commission hosted an event at the Eric Carle Museum in Amherst, MA featuring award winning author Jarret J. Krosocka reading from his book “Hey, Kiddo”, a graphic novel about growing up being raised by his grandparents and dealing with his mother’s addiction. The book has received many awards including the 2020 Odyssey Award for Excellence in Audiobook Production. The Commission provided every family with a copy of the book .



Supporting Support Groups in 2019

Grand-Families FUNd

The Commission received a very generous grant from the Massachusetts Councils on Aging (MCOA) in 2019. The Commission established the Grand-Families FUNd, a scholarship opportunity for support groups to engage in and enjoy an intergenerational activity with grandparents and grandchildren together. This scholarship was developed in order to provide a positive experience for grandparents and the grandchildren they are raising - it allows grandchildren to meet other grandchildren being raised by grandparents and it allows the grand-families to create positive memories together.

The Commission awarded 13 support groups a Grand-Families FUNd scholarship. Activities that groups enjoyed included a visit to Franklin Park Zoo, Butterfly Magic in Westford, a visit to the New England Aquarium, and a Cape Cod Canal Cruise, just to name a few.

- ❖ “This activity provided a welcomed and much needed break from routines. It allowed grandparents to share memories of their first trip to the aquarium and it allowed grandchildren to create a lifetime memory with their grandparents,” -Webster Support Group Facilitator
- ❖ “The event that our group planned ensured that everyone had a good time. The event lent itself to any age child, which is an issue for our group. We have grandkids that are teens and others in pre-school,” - Brimfield Support Group Facilitator
- ❖ “I just wanted to share with you what a great time my grandkids had at our support group event. At first my oldest grandchild, 15 years old, did not want to go. He eventually decided to go and had a great time with the other older kids at the event,” - Brimfield Support Group Member
- ❖ “This opportunity provided a comfortable and fun place for the grandparents to relax together and for the grandchildren to spend time with other children in their same situation,” - Newton Support Group Facilitator
- ❖ “This was such a relationship-builder for both the grandparents and the grandchildren! The most beneficial relationship builder was to the families to see that they are not alone in this circumstance,” - Ashburnham Support Group Facilitator
- ❖ “This outing for the grandparents and grandchildren was an opportunity to just let go and enjoy while being active,” - Taunton Support Group Facilitator

Margo Chevers Memorial Fund

The Commission lost one of its most dedicated and hardworking members in 2019. Margo Chevers was a grandmother raising her grandchildren in Wales, MA. She also founded and led a support group for many years. In her honor, the Commission established a memorial fund to provide assistance to Grandparent support groups throughout the state.

The Commission received a grant of \$6,000 from the Massachusetts Councils of Aging. The Commission solicited received 24 applications from support groups in Massachusetts and was able to award 12 groups a \$500 scholarship. Examples of how support groups have utilized this scholarship include creating self-care baskets for grandparents raising grandchildren, having meals at support group meetings, or purchasing art supplies to have craft nights during a support group meeting. Some groups used the funding for a special event such as a holiday party for the grandparents and the grandchildren to enjoy together. Here is what the facilitator of a support group in Westfield said about their event:

Please thank the commission for us. Our Holiday Party was a huge success. We had over 40 people and they all had a wonderful time. I used the funding to buy Christmas presents to put under the tree for the kids. I enlisted the talent of a local troubadour and we had a wonderful sing (and dance) along. I couldn't find a volunteer Santa but Boomer the mascot of the Springfield Thunderbirds made an appearance and the kids loved it...so did the Grandparents, lots of selfies and photo ops. We had a potluck dinner with plenty food thanks to a local restaurant that kindly agreed to donate a large tray of pasta and meat sauce. Our state rep attended and was taken aback by the crowd (and the commotion). Please thank the Commission for their generosity. They brightened up the season for a lot of families. These intergenerational activities mean so much. Thanks again Maureen Viturale, Westfield Grandparents Support Group.



Education for Grandparents and Service Providers

Through the Commission's spring and fall workshop series, we connected with over two hundred grandparents, relative caregivers, and service providers throughout the Commonwealth. The workshops held in 2019 were:

Date	Location	Topic
3/19/19	No. Attleboro	Helping Children Cope with Grief and Loss
3/28/19	Holyoke	The Benefits of Intergenerational Activities
4/25/19	Framingham	The impact of the opioid crisis on seniors/grandparents
5/20/19	Harwich	Setting Boundaries with Loved Ones
5/28/19	New Bedford	How Trauma Impacts Children
9/17/19	Acton	How Trauma Impacts Children
10/23/19	Franklin	Taking Care of the Caregiver
10/29/19	Gloucester	The Disease of Addiction
11/5/19	Worcester	Children's mental health



Acton Community Workshop 2019



Franklin Community Workshop 2019

2019 Annual Conference for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and Service Providers

The Commission's Annual Conference was held on June 5, 2019. We were honored to have Governor Baker speak. We also heard from Mrs. Baker, Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders, and Learn to Cope founder, Joanne Peterson. Over 200 people attended the conference and participated in workshops that covered topics such as "How Trauma Impacts Children and Families" and "Taking Care of the Caregiver." Grandparents and Relative Caregivers had the opportunity to visit over a dozen community service providers, such as the Family Resource Centers, WIC, Learn to Cope, and more, at resource tables.



Advocacy and Legislation

Child Care for Working Grandparents

In 2018, the Commission worked with the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) and the Division of Early Education and Care (EEC) on the issue of access to childcare for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren. Access to childcare is one of the top concerns of grandparents. In May of 2019 the Baker-Polito Administration announced a new initiative that will improve access to high-quality early learning opportunities for low-income children being raised by relative caregivers.

The new initiative, launched jointly by the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) and Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), will help approximately 3,800 caregivers access subsidized childcare if they are working.

Through the partnership, DTA can now authorize childcare for relative caregivers so the child can attend a high-quality early learning program through funding from EEC. Until now, DTA was only able to provide economic assistance for this population and

interested families may have been placed on a waiting list for childcare financial assistance. Early learning programs support young children's healthy development and also serve as an employment support for families by providing childcare when they are working.

Counsel for Indigent Grandparents in Guardianship cases

In 2019, the Commission continued to focus on passing legislation to provide counsel for indigent Guardians of Minors when a petition to remove a guardian is filed. This legislation would essentially put into law a 2017 ruling from the Supreme Judicial Court which provided that a judge can appoint counsel for indigent guardians of minors. The legislation has been reported out favorably from the Joint Judiciary Committee.

Study on the Impact of Opioid use on Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Grandchildren

The Grandparent's Commission advocated for legislative approval of funding to learn more about grandparents raising grandchildren in Massachusetts and their issues and concerns. The Legislature approved \$50,000 in the FY 19 budget for the Department of Elder affairs to contract with the University of Massachusetts to conduct a study on opioid use related to grandparents raising grandchildren and to report on, among other topics:

- “(i) the number of individuals in the commonwealth raising children of relatives;
- (ii) the number of individuals in the commonwealth raising grandchildren because 1 or both parents are addicted to an opioid drug;
- (iii) resources available to provide services to both the grandparents or other relatives and the children; and
- (iv) whether such services are coordinated in a manner that is beneficial to the grandparents and other relatives.”

Additional funding (\$17,500 each) was provided by the Office of the Child Advocate and the Office of the Attorney General to allow for a more detailed survey of Grandparents raising grandchildren.

The primary findings of the research are that there are more than 30,000 grandparents responsible for their grandchildren in Massachusetts. This includes households where a parent may or may not be present. Of these households, in approximately 20,000 the grandparents are between the ages of 30-59, while about 10,000 households have grandparents aged 60+.

A survey of grandparents and other relatives caring for children without the parents present was conducted through support groups and other outreach. A total of 415 grandparents and other relatives responded. The mother's drug or alcohol use was reported by 66% of the survey respondents as the reason why the child is living with the

grandparents. 40% of grandparents surveyed did not agree that they have a good understanding of the services available to help with raising the child. 70% of the grandparents surveyed were interested in knowing more about financial resources that might be available.

The final report of the survey and focus group results can be found here:

http://massgrg.com/massgrg_2019/assets/files/UMass-Report-Grandparents-Raising-Grandchildren-Updated-09062019.pdf

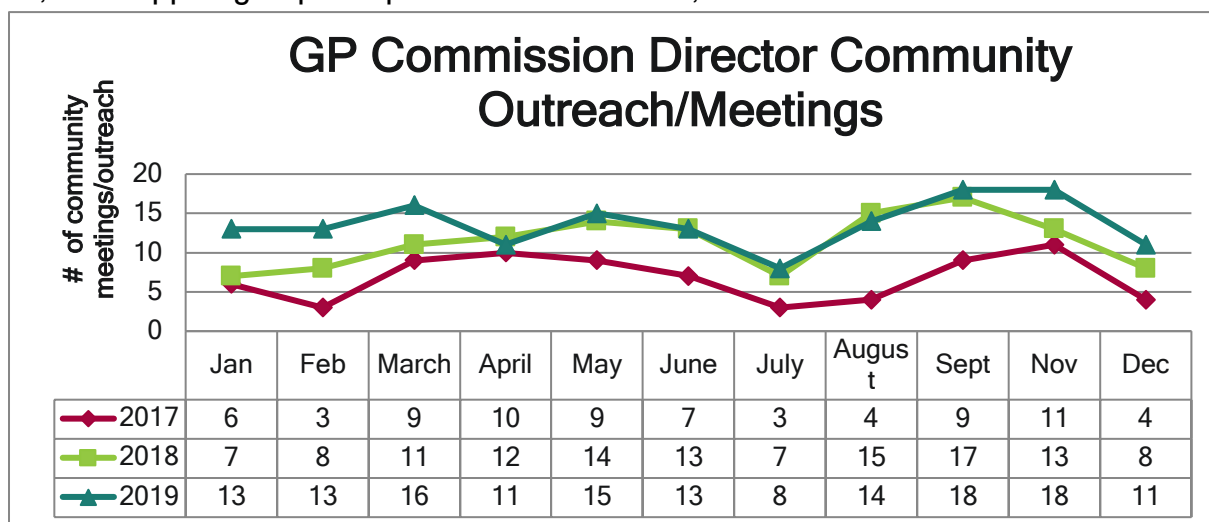
Commission Meetings/Presentations in the Community

Community Connections

The Commission continues to be active in promoting awareness of the issues facing grandparents raising grandchildren and in providing education and support to Grandparents. Under the auspices of the Commission's Director, Colleen Pritoni, the Commission connected with 150 community groups and agencies. Some of these meetings include:

- Massachusetts Councils on Aging
- Bourne Council on Aging
- Children's Trust
- Gloucester Community Workshop
- Worcester YMCA
- Learn to Cope
- Family Resource Centers Statewide
- You, Inc. Trauma and Loss Conference

As this chart indicates, there was an increase in requests from service providers, agencies, and support groups for presentations in 2019, from 125 in 2018.



Direct Contacts with the Commission

The number of direct contacts increased from 389 in 2018 to 457 in 2019. This includes phone calls, e-mails, and in-person contacts with grandparents, relative caregivers, and providers. Each call lasts an average of 15 minutes.

Looking Forward

In conclusion, 2019 was another extraordinarily active and productive year due in large part to the leadership and direction provided by our Director, Colleen Pritoni, and the support and assistance we receive from our fiscal agent, the Department of Children and Families. We thank DCF Commissioner Linda Spears for her support and contributions to the work of the Commission.

2020 will bring many new initiatives including:

- Spring Community Workshops in Mattapan, Milford, Asburham, Billerica, Chicopee and Bourne.
- Working with the Department of Children and Families to connect Grandparents raising grandchildren to the Kinship Navigator program in Massachusetts.
- Training for new Grandparent's Support Groups

Utilizing \$40,000 approved by the legislature in the FY19 Supplemental Budget the Commission will be working with UMass consultants from UMass Medical School to:

- Develop regional roundtables with support group facilitators and service providers to improve information and resource sharing and improve outreach;
- Develop strategies for efficient and effective outreach efforts by the Commission, ensuring grandparent/relative caregivers are getting the information they need.

We are grateful for the continued support of the Governor, the Legislature, the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Elder Affairs, The Department of Transitional Assistance, The Office of the Attorney General, the members of the Commission, and the many grandparents and others who volunteer their time to support grandparents raising their grandchildren in the Commonwealth.